



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES NEWSLETTER

October 2007

The South Asian Community and Domestic Violence

Fear of the unknown compels South Asian women to stay in abusive relationships

This is the first in a series of newsletters focusing on the issue of culture and domestic violence. The Office of Family Violence understands that experiences of domestic violence vary from person to person. These newsletters hope to offer a glimpse into how someone from a particular community or culture may see and experience domestic violence differently from another. Our first newsletter focuses on the South Asian (made up of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal) community. Nalini Rajguru, President of ASHA (Asian Women's Self Help Association) talked to Urmila Oberoi about what some of the women who seek services from the organization face when dealing with domestic violence.

Urmila Oberoi (UO): Can you talk a little bit about the unique cultural issues survivors in your community are dealing with when it comes to domestic violence? What cultural norms/practices have you seen that are different or unique from what someone else might be dealing with?

Nalini Rajguru (NR): Women are often very hesitant to come out and say they are being abused because of the social stigma that is still attached to domestic violence in the Asian community. The women think that the community will think that something is wrong with them as a wife and a mother; they are also concerned about leaving the family structure. There is this idea ingrained in the culture that a woman stays with the husband and family no matter what.

One of the other cultural issues that occurs within the Asian communities is the incidence of abuse not only by the husband, but also by a woman's in-laws. There was a recent case in Maryland where a woman pushed her husband in self-defense while he hit her and when the woman said she was going to leave, her in-laws said they would call the police on her and say that she was abusing her husband because she had pushed him away in self-defense. You may want to look at a paper called "Victims of Inti-

mate Partner Violence More Likely to Report Abuse by In-laws" if you can.

UO: What kinds of things have you seen that are compelling women to stay in abusive relationships in the Asian community? What kinds of thoughts do women have to justify themselves staying?

NR: Many of them are afraid to leave; after all, there is so much uncertainty if they do leave. They are afraid for their financial future, their children's future, and the thought of starting their life from the very beginning can be very overwhelming. This is where organizations like ASHA come in. We pay for English classes, and advocates help with things such as public transportation, route numbers, buses, and how to go to class. ASHA encourages them to learn the American system.

Women also stay because of a fear of the unknown. They do not know what to expect should they leave the abusive relationship. What I have found interesting, though, is that women would rather stay in America and assimilate to the culture here than go back to their country. Women want to learn the American system, want to

stay here, want to assimilate, want to become independent, want their children to grow up here. Of course, there is a wide economic spectrum of women we work with, but for the most part, the women want to stay and prefer to stay here.

UO: Do you find that women want to stay because of the reaction they will face if they return to their country?

NR: Many do not want to go back to their countries because they feel as if their family will not accept their decision of leaving the abusive relationship, and because they may not have a way of supporting themselves if they do go back. Also, they are scared of leaving the children behind in the U.S.

UO: What kinds of things can domestic violence programs do to be more conscious of those who come into their shelters seeking services? What kinds of things should they be asking at the intake level to be more sensitive to the cultural needs of a woman?

NR: Programs are to a certain level aware of the language needs of clients approaching them for services, but if they could seek out members in the community who could be translators that would be extremely beneficial. It would be helpful also if the shelters were aware of some of the cultural needs that many women may have. For example, some Muslim women pray five times a day and we have heard that there are sometimes

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Virginia Department of Social
Services
Office of Family Violence
7 N. 8th St., 4th Flr.
Richmond, VA 23219

Nancy Fowler
Program Manager
804-726-7502
804-726-7895 (fax)
Nancy.fowler@dss.virginia.gov

Lenora Jones-Elliott
Domestic Violence Program Specialist
804-726-7510
804-726-7895 (fax)
Lenora.joneselliott@dss.virginia.gov

Urmila Oberoi
Domestic Violence Communications
Specialist
804-726-7550
804-726-7895 (fax)
Urmila.oberoi@dss.virginia.gov

Maura Vilkoski
Domestic Violence Policy Specialist
804-726-7588
804-726-7895 (fax)
Maura.vilkoski@dss.virginia.gov

Office of Family Violence (OFV)

The Office of Family Violence (OFV) funds local public and private non-profit domestic violence programs whose mission and purpose are to address the issue of domestic violence within their community and respond to the needs of all people in that community who have experienced and/or been impacted by domestic violence.

OFV values the provision of consistent reliable services for victims and children in every locality of the Commonwealth. With the recent adoption of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Agency Accreditation manual, the funding priorities of the OFV will shift toward fully accredited programs.

Accredited domestic violence programs provide hotline, information and referral, crisis intervention, safety planning, emergency companion services, emergency transportation, individual support services, legal advocacy, support groups, children's services, community coordination and systems advocacy, community education, emergency housing services and outreach and access for underserved populations. For more information on Accreditation please see:

<http://www.vsdvalliance.org>.

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comments made about that. There are certain things that people coming into the shelter might do that others are not used to, but it is important to be sympathetic to particular needs. After all, this is a difficult transition period and women face depression, uncertainty, and stress, and they cannot always function at the speed they should. It is important to always be compassionate and understanding and know that the rate at which people are able to get on their feet is different for everyone.

UO: Thank you very much for your time.

NR: You're welcome, and please contact ASHA with any further questions.

Resources to go to for More Information on the Asian Community and Domestic Violence:

ASHA (Asian Women's Self Help Association)

Phone: 202-207-1248/ Fax: 202-296-2318

Hotline: 1-888-417-2742

Website: <http://www.ashaforwomen.org>

Boat People SOS (Assists Vietnamese refugees and immigrants)

Phone: 703-538-2190

Website: <http://www.bpsos.org>

Korean Community Service Center of Greater Washington (KCSC)

Phone: 703-354-6345

Website: <http://www.kcscgw.org>

"(Un)heard Voices- Domestic Violence in the Asian American Community"

This report is based on the results of a focus group with Asian immigrant women and Asian American women from different backgrounds.

Available at the Family Violence Prevention Fund website:

<http://www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=208>